

get the better of your melancholy
then as you remembered there was
if you continue to treat me as you
do uneasy by me long. tis impossible
have suffer'd since I saw you
to have bore the Rack much better
killing words of yours. Some
ed to die without seeing you
resolves to your misfortune
for there is something in this
prompts one so to find relief
give way to it. and beg you'd
kindly to me, for I am sure you
me to suffer what I have done could
reason I write to you, is because
should I see you. for when
you are angry, and there is something
ful, that it strikes me dumb. oh that
to much regard for me left, that
your soul with pity. I say so

1714

‘I could have bore the rack much better than those killing, killing words of yours’

Jonathan Swift’s tortured, triangular relationship with ‘Stella’ (Esther Johnson) and ‘Vanessa’ (Esther Van Homrigh) was the object of much speculation during his lifetime, and still attracts conjecture today. Born in Dublin in 1667, the author of *Gulliver’s Travels* moved to England in 1689 and became secretary to government official Sir William Temple. It was in Temple’s household that Swift met his life-companion, Stella, who in 1701 moved to Dublin with her chaperone, Rebecca Dingley, to take up residence near to St Patrick’s Cathedral, where Swift had obtained the prebend. It was during a visit to London in 1710 that Swift met Vanessa, the daughter of a Dutch merchant and twenty-one years his junior. They struck up a correspondence and Swift immortalised his feelings for her in his most famous work of narrative poetry, *Cadenus and Vanessa*. Like Stella before her, Vanessa followed Swift to Dublin and took up residence there, with the result that the two women unwittingly competed for his attention. In this letter, Vanessa bitterly protests at her perceived ill-treatment by Swift and pleads for another meeting. It is said that when Swift finally ended their turbulent affair in 1723, Vanessa died of shock. 💔



Dublin, 1714

Well now I plainly see how great a regard you have for me. You bid me be easy, and you'd see me as often as you could. You had better said, as often as you could get the better of your inclinations, so much, or as often as you remembered there was such a one in the world. If you continue to treat me as you do, you will not be made uneasy by me long. 'Tis impossible to describe what I have suffered since I saw you last; I am sure I could have bore the rack much better than those killing, killing words of yours. Sometimes I have resolved to die without seeing you more; but those resolves, to your misfortune, did not last long. For there is something in human nature that prompts one so to find relief in this world, I must give way to it, and beg you'd see me and speak kindly to me; for I am sure you'd not condemn any one to suffer what I have done, could you but know it.



The reason I write to you is because I cannot tell you, should I see you; for when I begin to complain, then you are angry, and there is something in your look so awful, that it strikes me dumb. Oh that you may but have so much regard for me left, that this complaint may touch your soul with pity. I say as little as ever I can: did you but know what I thought, I'm sure it would move you. Forgive me, and believe I cannot help telling you this, and live.

Sept. 17.

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 long. for there is something in human nature
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 it will give way to it. And how could I live and
 find fault with you, for I am sure you'd not condemn
 any one to suffer what I have, nor could you but permit
 the reason I write to you, is to ask if I cannot tell you
 how I am, for I am sure you'd not be so cruel
 then you are angry, and there is something in your mind
 so cruel, that it strikes me dumb. Oh that you may but
 know the words I send you, that the complaint
 may touch your heart. I wish I could tell you
 how I am, but I know what I thought, I am sure it could move
 you, to save me, I believe I cannot tell you your heart